Agencies target juvenile drinking

By MIKE DUNNE
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A new attack on the sale of alcohol to juveniles has been launched by a combination of city, parish, and state agencies.

The new program is "an ongoing effort, not a flash in the pan" campaign to stop juvenile drinking, Parish Attorney Lynn Williams said in announcing it. This is not the first time officials have announced crackdowns on drinking by juveniles and sale of alcohol to minors. But this time, Williams promised, the program will work, and interest will not be lost.

The difference this time "will be increased manpower and commitment from the different law enforcement agencies to work together," Williams said.

"It will be up to me to make sure the interest isn't lost," Williams said.

The increased manpower will come in the form of William's four-man investigative unit supplementing the three-man Alcoholic Beverage Control unit, with additional officers from city police, the sheriff's office and State Police called in as needed," Williams said.

"My four investigators will spend about 20 percent of their time on juvenile drinking cases — about one day a week," Williams said.

"If we can locate the sources, we're going to ask — and have been committed — all the manpower that we need to clean up the problem," the parish attorney said.

"Locating the source is the big thing. When we do, we'll get (ABC chief) Allen West's and my investigators on the streets. It will be more of the same thing he (West) has been doing, except with more investigators," Williams said.

We're all aware of the reports of increased alcohol consumption among minors," Williams said. "It is my intent to go to the source — those who place the profit gained from the sale of alcoholic beverages to young people above their legal and moral responsibility to this community."

A letter written by Williams and sent to all ABC permit holders and a proposed new ordinance are also part of the campaign, Williams said.

The new ordinance will make it a misdemeanor for anyone over the age of 18 to legally buy alcohol and give it to someone under the age of 18, Williams said.

That will fill a loophole in which someone 18 could legally buy beer or liquor and give it to someone who is 17. Youths who are 17 fall between the age of majority, 18, and juveniles, age 16 and under. Giving alcohol to youths under the age of 16 is covered by the laws prohibiting contributing to delinquency, Williams said.

Williams' letter to permit holders outlines the efforts law enforcement officials will make and is basically aimed at "those permit holders who might violate the law," the letter said.

It says that the ABC division has been removed from the treasurer's office to the parish attorney "because of a concern, by the mayor and the council, about the juvenile drinking problem."

It tells permit holders that his office, ABC, the state ABC unit under the direction of Tim Screen, Louisiana State Police Region I detectives and the city police and prosecutor's offices have "pledged cooperation and manpower necessary to deter the juvenile drinking problem in this parish."

"Our main objective will be the identification of persons selling alcoholic beverages to juveniles, their arrest for the violations, their subsequent prosecution and the suspension and/or revocation of alcoholic beverage permits and licenses," says the letter, which will soon arrive in permit holders' mailboxes.

Williams said that Screen will work on a statewide program similar to the one in this parish. (See JUVENILES, Page 14-A)
East Baton Rouge Parish effort. The parish attorney said that the new effort should not be construed as a slight against the three-man ABC division. He said that the division has to process and investigate all permit holders and has been left little time to work on the juvenile drinking problem.

Mayor Screen, who is the brother of the head of the state ABC unit, supports the program.

"It's a problem we can't get away from. It not only impacts young people hurting themselves . . . they can also hurt others," the mayor said.

In a related development, City Police Chief Pat Bonanno said that the special unit which scouts the roads looking for intoxicated drivers, will be back in action beginning Thursday.

Bonanno said the DWI task force would be back to working seven days a week. The seven-day operation was paid for by grants which ran out, forcing a cutback of the program to three days on the weekends.

The city-parish councils recently appropriated about $30,000 to continue the seven-day DWI task force.